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STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

RUSSIAN ORGANIZED CRIME, U.S. SECURITY AND RUSSIAN DEMOCRACY

BY

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ABSTRACT

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TITLE: Russian Organized Crime, U. S. Security and Russian Democracy.

FORMAT: Strategy Research Paper

Date: April 1997 PAGES: CLASSIFICATION: Unclassified

ABSTRACT: Russian organized crime threatens important United States interests in the development of Russian democracy. Russian criminals are taking advantage of the transition from communism to democracy. They are undermining Russian social and economic development and the Russian people's faith in democracy. Russian organized crime uses sophisticated operations to influence the public and make money. Russian criminals have taken advantage of the Russian public's confusion concerning individual rights and rights to private property. The Russian government's bureaucratic turmoil encourages organized crime. Russian organized crime's history, and its relationship with the former ruling Communist party, have enabled it to mobilize against Russian democracy.

Helping Russia remove the organized crime threat to democracy is in the U.S. interest. A democratic Russia can serve as a stable regional ally, a major trading partner, a democratic example to other Eurasia nations, and a contributor to the fight against international organized crime.

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Russian organized crime is a serious threat to Russian democracy and U.S. interests. Crime, and related social, economic, and political dilemmas cause great turmoil for Russia and therefore are a significant force undermining Russian faith in democracy. Russian democracy's suffering from organized crime negatively impacts more than just Russia. If Russian democracy does not continue the U.S. will lose a budding regional ally, a democratic example for other Eastern European countries, and a potential major trading partner. Russians may return to authoritarian type government or possibly even communism if they cannot control crime or resolve their other social ills. The U.S. can keep Russia on the road to democracy by increasing assistance. U.S. help will enable Russians to combat organized crime, build a firm foundation for democracy, and achieve U.S. interests.

OVERVIEW

President Yelstins advisors reported that Russian organized crime has an overpowering influence on everyday Russian life.¹ In a 1995 a USIA-sponsored survey, conducted

by the Institute for Comparative Social Research found that 71% of the Russian public agree that organized crime is having an increasingly negative impact on society.²

The above survey is a dramatic indicator of the impact of Russian organized crime on Russia. The Russian Mafia is using traditional and modern criminal operations to exploit Russian democracy and the new free economy. Russian democracy has difficulty controlling organized crime due to, its antiquated legal system, inadequate law enforcement, and weak economic regulations.

The Russian Mafia's history and its relationship with the former ruling communist government give it the power to negatively impact Russian democracy. During communism the Mafia provided services to both the communist party and Russian society. It filled the voids of the communist collective system. During the transition to open economic markets, a period of weak economic and social controls, the Mafia seized the opportunity to provide public services. The Mafia is now in competition with the government in providing services. The Mafia is a major force in Russia's expanding economy. Mafia operated security companies are more effective than Russian law enforcement.

A lack of an effective transition strategy from communism to democracy caused the Russian government and public to be confused and this gave Russian organized crime their opportunity. The drastically different social and economic realities of the two systems of government have the Russian public confused regarding what democracy can do for them. Before democracy, Communism provided all the basic necessities of life, even though they were often in short supply. And more importantly, Russian streets were safe. Today Russians think democracy is the reason why there is uncontrollably rising crime, an economy that has nearly stopped, and bureaucrats who are just as corrupted as they were during communism. Russian's expected more from democracy.

Improvements in the legal system, closing economic loopholes and building an effective law enforcement system are vital to building Russian democracy. If Russians fail to implement reforms they will remain vulnerable to organized crime and become less democratic. The Mafia could possibly dominate Russia. If this occurs, the U.S. will not gain a democratic Russian ally that can advance U.S. interests.

Russian Democracy and U.S. Interest

That Russia becomes a trading and security partner rather than reverting to a totalitarian rival. Russia being a democracy is a major step in achieving this aim because through democracy Russia will become a stable regional security and economic partner. The 1995 U.S. National Security Policy specifies that it is a vital concern to the U.S. that democracies develop throughout the world.³ Democracies are unlikely to promote wars, or engage in terrorism. They are likely to become valued members of the global economy that adhere to appropriate human rights policies and assume environmental responsibilities.⁴

The histories of democracies indicate that representative government and the division of governmental powers make their initiating war difficult. The former communist government was an oligarchy and only a few party leaders controlled national decision making without control by the Russian public. Since the Russian government is now accountable to Russians, they, for the first time, can directly influence governmental decisions. For example, through democracy Russians exerted political and public

pressure that affected the Russian governments' actions in supporting President Yelstin during the coup period of 1994 and during the Chechnia War.

Russian Democracy and Trade

The U.S. can benefit economically from Russian democracy. Russian democratic leadership is essential to correcting the mistakes of the past communist system in developing private enterprises and in transitioning to an open market economy. Such leadership can modernize the economy and increase the need for goods and services provided by the U.S. and U.S. Allies. This can in turn, result in Russia improving internal social conditions and external relations with the U.S. and other countries.⁵

Russian open markets replaced the Communist closed economic system. Open markets have attracted major foreign investment. The U.S., Germany lead investment in Russian with 28% and 20% of investment respectively of 1995 major foreign investors.⁶ Such investments result in some Russians having the money to buy the consumer products that

now flood their commercial markets and that improve the quality of Russian life.

Russian prosperity fostered by democracy creates an outstanding opportunity for the U.S. economy. Russia for 70 years has suffered from a closed and inferior economic system. The average Russian was unable to satisfy more than the basic needs due to constant shortages of goods. With democracy and prosperity Russians could become consumers. The U.S. is in a position to supply needed goods and to stimulate Russian industrial growth with investments. Russian industrial development could in turn lead to further regional stability and increase Russian reliance on building strong economic partnerships.

Stephen Sestanovich, writing for the Center for Strategic & International Studies, suggests that Russia is not only a long term investment market but due to its location it can be a vital economic link between Europe, Asia and North America.⁷

Russian Democracy and Regional Stability

Successful Russian democracy can become an example for former Communist Eastern Europe and today's Commonwealth of

Independent States (CIS). Democratic development in the CIS is of vital interest to the U.S. The growth of Eurasia democracies will reduce tension between former communist countries and hinder the development of threatening regional powers. If an Eurasia "domino effect" of democracy takes place, the U.S. can look forward to a future of partners, not the aggressors and opponents of the past.

Stephen Sestanovich contends that "a stable democratic Russia will clearly support U.S. interests in the geopolitical space of the CIS".⁸ For example, if Islamic radicalism in Central Asia became a threat to Russian or U.S. interests, Russian democracy could "constructively" contain it.⁹

Russian Democracy and the Control of International Organized Crime

U.S. interests, as well as those of all democracies, are threaten by the Russian Mafia alliance with international organized crime.¹⁰ Russia has become a breeding ground for developing and exporting organized crime. The Russian Mafia has strong relations with Mafiosi

in 29 other countries.¹¹ Russian organized crime has created both internal criminal franchise operations for other foreign crime organization and external Russian operations in the U.S. and elsewhere.¹² In North America Russian organized crime has established 200 gangs in 17 cities and a "series of prefect" in Canada, Crete, Greece and many other nations.¹³ In eastern European countries Russian criminals have recruited new organized crime members and tasked them to import drugs and locate nuclear material for sale.¹⁴

The successful growth of Russia democracy can reduce the influence of organized crime in Russia and internationally. The U.S. example of democracy controlling organized crime demonstrates that the accountability of a democratically elected leadership and judicial system, combined with democratically-motivated public involvement, can reduce the effectiveness of organized crime.

The United States has a definite interest in the success of Russian democracy.¹⁵ If Russia democracy succeeds in controlling crime, and in the other endeavor that will establish its legitimacy as a effective democracy, then the U.S. will gain a strong regional international

friend, a lucrative trading partners, and a ally in the war against organized crime.

Russian Organized Crime Operations

Russian organized crime closely models traditional sophisticated criminal organizations operating in other societies. The U.S. Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms definition of organized crime applies to the Russian Mafia.

Those self-perpetuating, structured, and disciplined associations of individuals or organizations who have combined together for the purpose of obtaining monetary or commercial benefits, or power, wholly or in part by illegal means, utilizing a pattern of corruption, violence and threats of violence to achieve their goals and protect their activities.¹⁶

Russian criminals are extremely brutal but they have a strict code of behavior. They respect senior members, and have close links with the political and economic elite. A key difference between Russian organized crime and its international counterparts is that the Russians tend to operate with less hierarchical control.¹⁷

The advent of an inefficient Russian democracy gave the Mafia a tremendous opportunity and the transition to an open market gave organized crime an opportunity to plunder. The

Mafia feared a democratic government less than the repressive Communist regime that was extremely brutal towards criminals.¹⁸ The Russian Mafia became unmatched in the "art of turning a dishonest dollar."¹⁹ According to Claire Sterling in the Thieves' World, Russian organized crime became adept at profiting from selling everything from unpaired shoes to a \$100 billion rubles worth of fake credit cards.²⁰

Russian organized crime favors operating in the current Russian democratic chaos.²¹ The Mafia's strategy is to capitalize on any lack of public confidence in democracy's ability to provide a service and to attempt to compete in providing that service. To stay in the service business the Mafia must give the impression that they can replace government in a wide spectrum of areas. For example, according to the chairman of the Russian Commodities & Raw Materials Exchange, the Mafia has attempted to imitate the government by creating its own tax, security and administrative systems.²²

The Russian Mafia has developed a network that can control street crime and exercise political influence. In my opinion Russian organized crime control of street crime

is a method to demonstrate the Mafia's influence over everyday Russian life. Contract murders and Mafia owned "security companies" are means by which Russian criminals demonstrate their power to the Russian public.

The Mafia uses bribery to achieve political influence over Russian government officials. Russian government reports relate that in 1993 there were 4,500 cases of bribery of 1500 officials. None of these officials were every convicted.²³ Thus corruption of the Russian government by criminal and other elements has become the norm rather than the exception.²⁴

According to the Russian Interior Ministry (MVD) there are some 5,000 organized crime operations with approximately 20,000 formal members and many more "part timers."²⁵ They have a broad financial base and have the "best" people. Since the Mafia is one of the leaders of the Russian economy they have attracted many talented employees.²⁶ These new Mafia employees have reshaped the Mafia making it tough to penetrate.²⁷

Russian crime expert Dr Galeotti of the University of Keele, United Kingdom, has classified Russian organized crime by specialties:

Pseudo-businessmen - specialist in financial crimes. They enjoy assistance from other Mafia groups and establish legal banks and businesses to launder money.²⁸

Gangsters - traditional criminals who undertake activities such as drug dealing, gambling and directed street violence. They are enforcers of organized crime activities, street thugs who act on specific organized crime instructions. These Mafia members often perform "security services" for businesses.²⁹

Embezzlers - officials who steal state property.³⁰

Bribe-takers - Russian officials that demand pay-off for using state resources.³¹

Coordinators - 400 senior Mafia members who make the, major deals, create criminal and government alliances and arbitrate disputes between criminal organization.³²

Russian organized crime operations have impressed many in U.S. law enforcement and in U.S. organized crime. For example, the Russian Mafia has used ingenuity and imagination to accomplish "clever and sophisticated paper crimes" like bank and tax fraud and counterfeiting.³³ They are unlike most other criminal operations that are inflexible, generally specializing in one type of crime (e.g., Colombian drug cartels).³⁴ Russian crime operations are very flexible and change specialization as the market demands.³⁵

The 1994 Annual Russian Crime Report noted that the Mafia controls more than criminal activities: it controls all activities.³⁶ Not only have they used illegal profits to buy Russia real estate, factories, weapons production, and raw materials, but they have ventured into other far flung areas.³⁷ For example organized crime owns 47 stock exchanges and 400 banks, some with offices in other countries such as Antigua.³⁸

Russian organized crime maintains its advantage by bribery or threatening government officials. Russian crime experts estimate that 50% of the Mafia's income goes to bribes for government officials.³⁹

A revealing assessment of the effectiveness of Russian Mafia's activities is that Russians feel they cannot avoid the Mafia. The Mafia controls many of the commercial markets and can get results for Russians quicker than the government. Russian organized crime has affected Russian society to the extent that, sadly, many Russians and foreigners have come to accept the unpleasant reality that organized crime is a way of life.⁴⁰ This telling perception does not speak well of the progress of Russian democracy.

Russian Organized Crime Undermines Democracy

Russian Mafia activities undermine Russian democracy by preventing the development of a fair legal system, free market economic conditions and effective law enforcement. Russian organized crime is attempting to replace the current deficit in credible Russian democratic political institutions. There is a "lack of democratic robust cohesive independent political parties, strong leadership, and established rules" and the Mafia tries to fill this vacuum.⁴¹ The Russian democracy has been unable to smoothly replace the former communist government institutions and the Mafia has the organization, power and desire to do so.⁴²

Organized Crime and the Russian Legal System

Russia's outdated and inefficient laws and legislation have detracted from the growth of Russian democracy and encouraged organized crime. The court system that formerly answered only to the dictates of the Communist party leadership, has become another unwitting ally of organized crime.⁴³ The communist party leadership determined judicial

decisions rather than decisions based on laws. Since there was no real legal foundation for the nascent Russian democracy to work from it is not surprising that there are no laws to combat organized crime. Activities such as corruption, money laundering, and embezzlement are not illegal.⁴⁴ Also, due to a holdover communist principle of "judiciary inviolability," law enforcement cannot investigate the often corrupt courts.⁴⁵ In the midst of such legal and bureaucratic confusion, the Mafia flourishes.

Organized Crime and the Russian Economy

The Mafia has used loopholes in Russian laws to buy and export commodities. This trade has allowed them to make a tremendous profit. For example, through Mafia-controlled Spets-Export firm, the Mafia buys oil at low domestic price and sells it at a market price 200% higher.⁴⁶ Similar Mafia economic activities cost Russia, in 1995 alone, \$4 billion.⁴⁷

Russian organized crime steals state economic revenues and restrains economic activity. This hinders the Russian government's ability to pay for its activities and damage

the economy. Most of the former state owned property is now in the hands of the Mafia.⁴⁸ In addition, 1994 Mafia ownership of legal and paralegal businesses accounted for the Mafia controlling 55% of the capital in the country and 80% of the voting stock.⁴⁹ Using this control of these companies the Mafia steals profits and avoids Russian tax. This in turn leads to a rise in taxes on legitimate businesses.

Through crimes such as bank and stock fraud, and counterfeiting of money and documents, the Mafia weakens confidence in the Russian monetary system. These criminal activities are so lucrative that they attract thirty to forty percent of the Mafia.⁵⁰

Russian organized crime restrains Russian economic growth by inhibiting Russian business from being to successful.⁵¹ Many new ventures try to avoid Mafia attention by limiting their success. Often to avoid Mafia attention many business's will operate underground. Other business's that can not avoid Mafia attention pay 20 to 30% of their profits for protection.⁵² In either case, these businesses never pay any Russian tax and this has disastrous effects on the entire Russian economic system. Russian

government economists favor fighting the Mafia with effective economic laws.

Progress in curbing economic abuses is slow. One example, is that President Yelstin, yielding to International Monetary Fund pressure, has canceled export and import privileges and ended "special exporter" status. Various government organizations, including government officials and special interest groups held these exemptions.⁵³ At first these exemptions funded worthy causes such as the Afghan War Veterans Fund, but they quickly expanded to fund government organizations like the State Protection Directorate.⁵⁴ Due to the large profit these organizations have earned with export and import privileges, there is reason to believe the Mafia is heavily involved in them.

Organized Crime and Russian Law Enforcement

The Russian law enforcement has proven ineffective against Russian organized crime. Underpaid Russian law enforcement agencies who are ill-trained and under-equipped cannot battle the Mafia. Russian police earn about \$100 a

month, so it is not surprising that there is a great deal of corruption. One internal anti-corruption operation nabbed 1,500 corrupt cops in Moscow alone.⁵⁵ Organized crime is also defeating Russian law enforcement by using high tech equipment which Russian law enforcement lacks such as computers, portable phones, fax's, and short wave radios.⁵⁶

Since Russian law enforcement is ineffective, Russians and foreign business have no choice but to use the services of "security companies."⁵⁷ The growth of these companies has indirectly influenced the activities of state structures. There has been a mass drain of professionals from the military and law enforcement agencies into these private concerns that pay salaries that are three times higher than the norm.⁵⁸ For example 50% of the KBG in Moscow left government service.⁵⁹ The Mafia, has established its own private security companies. Security companies provide the needed services not provided by the courts that include settling contract disputes and enforcing the repayment of loans.⁶⁰ Often murder is the means of settling disputes.

In many nations the military can come to the assistance of law enforcement operations to combat organized crime,

however such is not the case with Russian military. The Russian military is unable to assist law enforcement due to wide spread corruption in its ranks. Today's Russian military personnel often commit crimes to supplement their pay that is usually months behind.⁶¹ They help organized crime steal government weapons to make money. In 1994 there were 6,430 cases of theft of military weapons, including tanks and rocket launchers.⁶² In 1995 there was a 20% increase in thefts of military property. These included Mafia brokered thefts of nuclear bomb-making material such as enriched uranium and cesium-137.⁶³

Organized Crime's Threat to Russian Culture

Russian culture, after 70 years of communist rule, was unprepared and confused by freedom of democracy. This confusion allows Russian organized crime to compete with the democratic government for influence over Russian values.

Organized Crime and Russian Values

For democracy to be successful in fighting organized crime the society must establish a moral and ethical understanding of individual rights and private property. Some Russians today think it is just to steal private property because it was most likely acquired by dishonest means.⁶⁴

Russian culture is vulnerable to organized crime, due to society's confusion regarding personal rights and private property. For seven decades Russians were subject to a repressive and authoritative Communist Party where property belonged to the masses. Communists created a myth that the Soviet Union was a classless society and that the state provided for the basic needs for every citizen. Citizens in turn believed that what their government told them was for the good of all.

Organized crime is indirectly benefiting from this mindset instilled by the Communists in the Russian people. The communist revolution in 1917 disrupted the process of civilizing Russian society. Russians subsequently lost an understanding of concepts of private property and rights of

individuals.⁶⁵ These ideas returned only with Gorbachev. But now, in the opinion of many Russians, these values have led to everyone randomly grabbing and taking something for themselves.⁶⁶ This attitude lends legitimacy to Russian organized crime.

Russian political scientist Nicolai N. Petro suggests that Russia needs "a new national ideal rooted in the traditional values of patriotism and Orthodox Christianity," both essential components of a new Russian National identity.⁶⁷

Russian Organized Crime and Communism

Russian organized crime has the advantage of a long history of cooperation with the former Communist party.⁶⁸ Organized crime helped the Communist party obtain services for party members. It also assisted in moving goods on the shadow economy for the public.⁶⁹ Today this association continues.

The Mafia has an organization that can steal from Russia's open economic markets, and do so with impunity, and the former communist party elite are getting their share of

these thefts. Former Soviet elites called "nomenklatura capitalist" are becoming wealthy financiers.⁷⁰ There is growing evidence that nomenklatura capitalist are using organized crime groups as forces to control former state run operations.⁷¹

Prior to democracy Russian organized crime played a key role in the supporting the Russian public. They have a similar role today.⁷² Since, many Russian staples were in constant short supply the communist government condoned the creation of the "market and shadow" economies.⁷³ Russians would produce items at their government jobs and sell them out the back door. Russian's justified this practice since no one owned state property. In reality the Communist regime created a "kleptocracy."⁷⁴ Since these activities were illegal and essentially a private business, the Mafia operated a black market to sell the goods.⁷⁵ They still operate this way today.

Today the Mafia is using members of the former communist party and Russian public in support of it's growth. Former Communist party officials, who hold positions in the democratic government, need Mafia support to steal and protect their interests. The Russian people

perceive they need the Mafia to provide services that the Russian government cannot.

The Communist party was thus the real godfather of organized crime.⁷⁶ Since the party controlled all aspects of society they also controlled organized crime. For example, the party had total control of the movement of cash rubles and made large-scale criminal operations impossible without party cooperation.⁷⁷ Since many former Communist bureaucrats are still part of today's democracies there is good reason to suspect many "hidden Mafia's" are within the democratic regime.⁷⁸

Reforms that Can Control Organized Crime

Russian citizens must realize that one way to start eliminating today's economic and social ills is to control the Mafia. Russians can then develop confidence in Russian democracy and therefore support democratic government.

The Mafia effect can be neutralized through updating laws and establishing a responsive court system. Effective law enforcement and military leadership must be developed to

combat Russian organized crimes. Without these measures organized crime will continue to weaken Russian democracy.

Recommendation for U.S. Policy

The U.S. has the experience, ability, and willingness to assist Russian democracy in combating the effects of organized crime. Russia democracy can not only benefit from the U.S. historical experience in fighting organized crime but also from direction and training.

In addition with U.S. advisory assistance, Russia can develop a representative government that will hold officials accountable and subject to public scrutiny. Representative government can, in turn, lead to the development of anti-crime institutions such as strong independent leadership, and honest and forceful legislative factions, parties, and electoral goals that are all aid in fighting organized crime.

The accountability and the public involvement in western democracies fight against organized crime are examples of what societies can do to reduce the effect of this element. Russian organized crime is competing to gain

public support by turning themselves into effective social and political institutions. If democratic institutions are successfully in providing services, that builds public confidence and eliminates public desire to turn to Mafia services.

Russians need the U.S. to map the way for democracy. The U.S. must continue to fund foreign assistance programs that promote elections and the development of a judicial system. Free elections with several independent parties can reduce possible Mafia abuse. In November 1994 USAID assisted in the development of the Russia's Voting Rights Act.⁸³ This act improved the process of the 1993 national elections by establishing an independent election commission, voting rights and Duma elections.⁸⁴ Such enablers of free elections can defeat the public apathy used by Russian organized crime to remain effective. While the Russian election process is not prefect, it has established a foundation on which to build. However, the ultimate test will be Russian societies confidence in this process.

The U.S. must assist Russia and other nations in controlling the use of international banking, and computers, to hide Russian Mafia profits. Russian organized crime uses

the latest electronic equipment, and due to many countries liberal banking laws, the Mafia can hide their profits. Therefore nations fighting organized crime must track where the Mafia's money goes. Establishing Russian banking laws and international banking cooperation agreements can eliminate these loopholes and negatively impact Mafia operations.

The U.S. has assisted Russian crime fighting efforts by invoking the International Emergency Economic Powers Act.⁸⁶ This act enables nations to improve their tracking of the flow of capital generated by criminal operations. Participating nations, using this act can now investigate and undercut organized crime's ability to use laundered illegal profits to sustain their financial power base.

Another method to reduce the power of Russian organized crime is for the Russians to work with the U.S. and eliminate Mafia resources. Profits from the Mafia's criminal activities fund the corruption of Russian government officials. Since the Russia Mafia includes criminal enterprises outside of Russia, the Russian government must work with the U.S., and other countries, to stop the Mafia from making these profits. For example, with

U.S. assistance the Russian government can track the Russian Mafia's use of computers to commit complex bank fraud and hide profits in Antiguan banks.⁸⁵ If the Russian organized crime financial base is eliminated the Mafia's ability to corrupt Russian government officials will be reduced and a smear on Russian democracy will be removed.

Continued U.S. and international law enforcement funding, training, and equipping of Russian law enforcement, and the sharing criminal intelligence information, can support an active fight against organized crime. A few police leaders are attempting to eliminate corruption. For example, Russia's Minister of Internal Affairs (MVD) Kulikov imposed a goal of eliminating corruption from the MVD ranks. Minister Kulikov conducted operation "Clean Hands," netting the dismissal of 2,500 MVD employees, and the criminal conviction of 1,406.⁸⁷ With the help of U.S. and international law enforcement agencies Russian law enforcement can build a competent organized crime fighting force.

CONCLUSION

The U.S. has significant interests in Russian democracy and in curbing the effects of Russian organized crime on this democracy. With the assistance of the U.S. Russians, can stop the weakening impact of organized crime on democracy.

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⁷⁵OL'GA V. Kryshstanovskaia, "Illegal Structures in Russia," Russian Social Science Review 37, no. 6 (November-December 1996): 46.

⁷⁶Klebnikov, 130.

⁷⁷Galeotti, Mafiya Organized Crime in Russia, 15.

⁷⁸U.S. General Accounting Office, "Promoting Democracy - Progress Report on U.S. Democratic Development Assistance to Russia", (Washington D.C.: February 1996), 4

⁷⁹Ibid.

⁸⁰Sterling, 15.

⁸¹The White House, A National Security Strategy of Engagement and Enlargement, (Washington D.C. 1996), 28.

⁸²Galeotti, Kulikov's police: An update, 435.

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